

The IRON CLAW

by Arthur Stringer

Author of
"THE OCCA-
SIONAL OF-
FENDER," "THE
WIRE TAP-
PERS," "GUN
RUNNERS," ETC.
Novelized from
THE PATHE
PHOTO PLAY
OF THE
SAME NAME

SYNOPSIS.

On Windward Island, Palidori intrigues Mrs. Golden into an appearance of evil which causes Golden to capture and torture the Italian by branding his face and crushing his hand. Palidori opens the dyke gates and floods the island and in the general rush to escape the flood kidnaps Golden's six-year-old daughter Margery. Twelve years later in New York a masked One calling himself "the Hammer of God" rescues an eighteen-year-old girl from the cadet Casavanti, to whom Jules Legar has delivered her, and takes her to the home of Enoch Golden, millionaire, whence she is recaptured by Legar. Legar and Stein are discovered by Manley, Golden's secretary, setting fire to Golden's buildings, but escape. Margery's mother fruitlessly implores Enoch Golden to find their daughter. The Masked One again takes Margery away from Legar. Legar loots the Third National bank, but again the Laughing Mask frustrates his plans.

SIXTH EPISODE

THE SPOTTED WARNING

Enoch Golden had never formed the habit of taking others into his confidence. And when events came into his life which seemed to leave him more and more dependent on his immediate associates he "trayed an occasional tendency to focus his nebulous resentment against that situation on the exasperatingly imperturbable figure of David Manley.

"Young man," he said, fixing his secretary with a steady eye, "I came to this decision twenty long years ago, and nothing is going to change it. That woman was sent from my home, and she will never enter it again."

Manley, looking down at the note still held in his hand, thought of the troubled and tear-stained face of the girl who had so recently clung to his arm and asked him to plead her cause. And the memory of Margery Golden brought fresh courage to him.

"But this woman who was once your own wife is only asking for a glimpse of her own daughter again. Surely that is asking little enough!"

"And I repeat that I won't allow it. I have saved my daughter from the dangers that woman's wrong surrounded her with. I have saved her from—"

"Have you?" interrupted Manley, deliberately meeting the older man's stare. Any retort the older man was about to utter remained unspoken, for at that moment a soft-treading footman entered the room and crossed to the desk with a salver of mail in his hand. Manley, looking up, eyed that servant resentfully, and with a touch of suspicion. This intruder, he promptly surmised, was a new figure in the household retinue.

"Be so good as to knock when you enter this room," was the young secretary's sharp command.

"Very good, sir," answered the new footman, scarcely raising his eyes.

"H'h!" Golden scoffed, looking up from the letter which he had just opened. "Since you're so ready to ask favors, here's another friend to ask them for. Here's the captain of the circle you're so ready to champion! But instead of asking favors you see, he demands them!"

He tossed the folded sheet angrily across the desk top. Manley took it up and read it.

"Your happiness hangs on one small scrap of paper. That paper is the portion of the Windward Island chart



Traces the Telephone Circuits.

which you still hold. Unless this is delivered to me, and delivered as I have already directed, the Spotted Warning will come to your daughter Margery. And the meaning of the Spotted Warning she already understands.

"And what do you intend to do?" asked Manley, still staring down at this strange note.

"Do you suppose," retorted Golden, with a slightly tremulous finger already on the bell, "that I'm going to empty my safe to every blackleg who bandies about a catch-word that belongs to little Italy?"

"But what earthly use is this piece of chart to you?" asked the younger man.

"It's use to me is not the point at issue," doggedly retorted the older man.

"But one point at issue is at least the safety of your daughter," contended Manley, remembering only too well the events of the immediate past.

"And that, young man, is a responsibility which still rests on my own shoulders," was Golden's curt retort as the new footman stepped into the room in answer to his summons. "Tell Miss Margery to come here at once."

As Margery quietly stepped into the room Golden stared at her for a moment and then sank back into his chair.

"What is the Spotted Warning?" he suddenly demanded.

The girl, with her troubled eyes bent on the grim-faced face of her father, did not speak at once.

"The Spotted Warning?" she repeated, in a little more than a whisper.

"Yes, what is that supposed to mean?"

"It is a warning of death," was the girl's quietly enunciated reply. Manley could detect the tremor that sped through her body. "And it means that you have been hearing from Legar again!"

"But what does Legar mean by it?" asked Manley. "Why should he use such a phrase?"

"It is a warning that comes to the person who is about to die. It is a message of warning, spotted black. It is the last word they send. And I have heard them say it has never failed—never once!"

But the indomitable old fighter at the desk was once more on his feet.

"That Sicilian black-magic stuff can't intimidate me," he thundered out.

He turned to his daughter. "Until this Calabrian brigand force is played out, I'm going to send you into the country."

"But where are you sending me?" asked the girl.

"I'm going to send you out to your Aunt Agatha's on Long Island!" was his curt response as he swung about to his secretary. "And while Margery's getting her things together, Manley, you send Train, the chauffeur, here to me for his instructions."

Manley, promptly crossing to the door, was startled to find the figure of the new footman standing close beside it as it was swung open.

Ten minutes later, when Manley returned to the library with Train at his heels, he found Enoch Golden staring down at a sheet of paper lying on his desk. At the center of this paper stood a large black blot.

"It's the Spotted Warning," said Golden, his heavy face furrowed with a trouble deeper than he was willing to admit. "But how, in God's name, did it get here?"

Manley, after staring at the strangely-spotted sheet, stared even more intently at the ceiling directly above the point where the paper lay on the desk-top. A momentary look of satisfaction flitted across his face as Golden turned to him with a crisp command to precede Margery to Cedarton and there explain both the reasons for her visit and the precautions to be exercised during that visit.

"And as for you, Train," continued the grim-eyed old millionaire, turning to his chauffeur, "I want you to take my daughter out to Cedarton as quickly as your car and the speed laws will let you carry her. There are special reasons for this, remember. And from the moment you leave this house, don't let anything or anybody stop you."

Thirty minutes later Margery Golden, surrounded by her bags, sat back in the swaying automobile, puzzled over this new and unexpected turn in the tide of events. And as mile by mile swam by beneath the hurrying wheels, the keen-eyed man in the driving seat found a load lifted from his own shoulders.

Yet at the next turn in the road his light-heartedness suddenly departed from that keen-eyed driver. For as he took this turn and speeded up along a dustless stretch of open highway, he saw a figure run out to the middle of the road. It was not the fact that this figure stood directly in his path that most disturbed him. It was the discovery, as he drew down on it, that this figure wore a yellow band of cloth across the eyes, with a moon-shaped apron falling almost to the end of the nose, that brought the redoubtable Train's heart suddenly up in his mouth. But even while that figure remained stubbornly and directly in his path, motioning for him to stop, he remembered his orders. Instead of slackening his speed, in fact, he increased it, increased it to the limit of the engine's power. And he would surely have ridden down that would-be interceptor had not the latter, at the last moment, leaped quickly aside.

Margery Golden, as he did so, half rose in her seat, for she, too, had caught sight of that mysteriously-shadowed face.

"But that was the Laughing Mask!" she cried aloud, in wonder, as they swept on.

A little later she was startled by a

quick cry of warning bursting from the driver's throat. Staring ahead, she saw that still another effort was being made to intercept them. This time it was a man with a red flag. Instead of stopping, the car swept past the man so close that its fender-end slapped against the flagstick itself as he repeated his lusty shout of command. But that command was more or less lost on Train, a little dizzy now with the sheer drunkenness of speed.

"Stop!" mocked the driver as he raced on. "I'm going to stop for nothing this side of hell!"

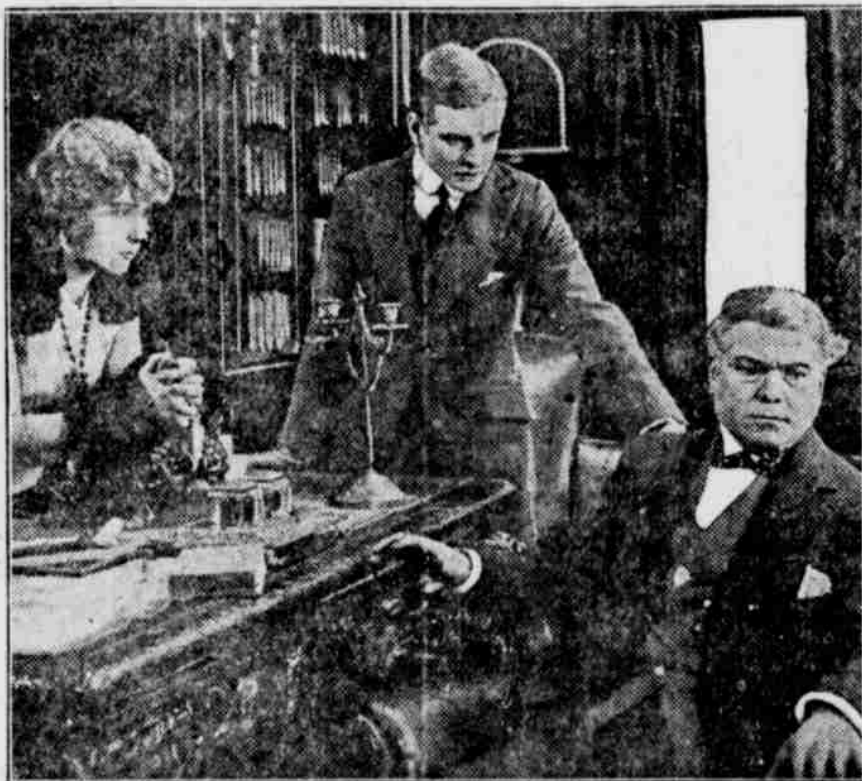
Yet that valiant boast was little more than the articulation of mortal pride so often preluding mortal disaster. For, leaping down on them along that lonely stretch of roadway they could already see a second car. The point about this car that worried Train was that it was not approaching them as a well-behaved car should approach a comrade vehicle, but vermiculated drunkenly from one side of the road to the other. Even Margery, as she leaned forward, puzzling over these strange movements, realized that peril was involved in passing a vehicle so uncertain of its course. At the same time, too, she could hear from far behind her the prolonged and warning cry of an auto horn, wailing disturbingly through the quiet air of the late afternoon.

The next moment the two cars had met, head-on.

There was a crash of metal and glass, a rending of honey-comb radiators and coppered fenders.

What happened after that for all time remained strangely like a dream to Margery. She remembered seeing Train lying close beside his wrecked car, with the blood trickling from his wrist and staining his whipcord uniform. She remembered seeing other figures, even more helpless looking. But most of all she remembered how one of these figures, pulling himself together, had slowly risen to his feet. As he did so he turned half-stupidly about and stared down at her. And the moment she saw that pallid yet triumphant face she knew that it was Legar. She knew that he was confronting her, that he was slowly but determinedly making his way towards her. And she knew that in another moment she would have been their prisoner again had not a sudden and unlooked-for interruption taken place.

This interruption came in the form of a flying roadster, with a masked figure leaning low out from its running board as it swept down on them. She remembered the sudden shout of the men, the sudden clutch of the



"It is a Warning of Death!" Was the Girl's Reply.

strong hand as it caught at her while the roadster swept by, the equally sudden pain through her bruised body as she was swung safely up into the seat of the onward swerving car. She remembered, too, the arm close about her as she lay back, weak and panting, as they danced and speeded on along that lonely road. She remembered turning in through a stone gate, winding along an orderly gravel driveway, stopping before a vine-bowered bungalow. She remembered, as the masked man at her side helped her in through an ivory-white door, turning dazedly to him and asking who he was. And she remembered the smile that showed just beneath the fringe of the yellow domino as he shook his head and the sense of deprivation that swept through her as she found herself once more alone. Then from the same door through which the Laughing Mask had stepped, she remembered, she had seen a quiet-eyed woman come out, a quiet-eyed woman who had crept up to her, with tears welling from her eyes and a smile of pitying tenderness about her lips.

"Margery, don't you know me? Don't you remember your own mother?" that quiet-eyed woman had asked, as she had taken her in her arms. And as she stared up into that motherly face, bent so close over her own, she had said, with a gasp of bewilderment, "Are you—the Laughing Mask?" But her mother, she remembered, had smiled, almost sorrowfully, and had put a finger to her lips.

The Tower of Destiny. Enoch Golden, anxious and worn-out, sat waiting for some further word as to the fate of his daughter Margery. Nothing had come to him since Train's startling message of the collision and the even more startling news of the girl's mysterious disappearance. He would have got little consolation from a talk that was taking place over the

servants' telephone below stairs. Part of that guarded conversation was carried on by Wrench, the new footman, and much of it had to do with the very situation so disturbing the aged millionaire in the room above. For it was Legar explaining that a masked stranger at the last moment had snatched the girl from their hands and had apparently carried her off to some hiding place of his own. This was followed by the command to deliver still another message to Enoch Golden, with the final warning that every wire leading into the Golden house must be cut as soon as possible.

The new footman, in obedience to these orders, quietly traced out the telephone circuits to the basement and there severed the wires with a pair of scissors purloined for the purpose from Mile. Celestine's workbag. Then, watching his chance, he carefully penned a note, wording it as Legar had duly instructed him to do. Then he returned to the neighborhood of the library door, with his ferretlike alertness masked under his customary immobility of face.

It was not until his restless master discovered the telephone wires to be dead, and went storming through the house to determine the reason for this misadventure, that Wrench realized his chance had come. Slipping into the deserted library on the pretext of adjusting the rugs, he stopped before the rosewood table, hesitated a moment, and then lifted the heavily-chased lid of Golden's cigar case and dropped the note inside. A moment later he had left the room, unobserved and unsuspected.

It did not take many minutes of waiting to confirm the wisdom of Wrench's movement. For Enoch Golden, striding restlessly back into his library, sank with a sigh of weariness into the armchair beside the rosewood table. For a moment or two he stared abstractedly and unhappily about him. Then, with still another sigh, he reached out and lifted the heavily-chased lid of silver. His fingers, instead of coming in contact with a perfect corset in gold, rustled against a sheet of paper. Automatically he picked it up and unfolded it.

Written on that mysterious sheet he found the following:

"To fight me further in this is useless. And unless you open your eyes to this fact it will soon be worse than useless. It will be fatal. I repeat that I want your half of that chart. If you want your daughter to live, want her sent back to you, take that chart to the twenty-fourth floor of the Central Tower building, within the next hour,

Manley's first thought, in his dilemma, was to commandeer some nearby car. Yet nothing but a racer, he remembered as he snatched out his watch, could get him to the Central Tower building in time.

His next thought, however, took him tearing down the village street like a madman. For the name of "Cedarton" had brought into his mind yet another name, the name of "Bobby Ewart." And Bobby Ewart, who had his workshop and hangar on the southerly outskirts of that village, had been the first of the Racquet club members to forsake automobiles for aviation, and startle Long Island by his early morning hydroplane maneuvers over suburban golf courses and country homes. He had been the first civilian volunteer for the federal air scouts and at San Diego had twice broken his own altitude record established at Pensacola, and was now immersed in the mysterious task of fashioning a stabilizer for monoplane, a stabilizer, Manley remembered, which was receiving sympathetic attention from certain navy officials in Washington.

Instead of finding this same intrepid Bobby poring over blue prints of stabilizer parts, however, the breathless Manley found his old-time friend in a rattan club chair tranquilly playing chess with his maiden aunt. In two minutes the breathless newcomer had explained to the somewhat ased young chess player a situation which brought a brighter light into the latter's boyish eyes.

"The point is," cried Manley, "could you get me there. Could you make a landing at night?"

They were already on their feet again, running for the hangar.

"Yes, I can get you there! But what have we got to make a landing on?"

"The main building of the Central tower stops at the eighteenth story. That gives us a flat roof of several hundred yards. Could you make it on that?"

"Not unless it was lighted!" explained Ewart, shouting for his mechanic as he rounded the gloomy corner of the hangar itself.

"But it is lighted," Manley told him. "It gets the light from the tower itself, and the whole cornice line is strung with electric lights, the same as the Singer building!"

Ewart's finger, touching a button, threw a white flood across the vaulted roof of the building. A touch on another button sent the great doors swinging open. Manley looked at his watch. Then he shook his head.

"It's too late," he proclaimed. But Ewart and his mechanic were already at work on the wide-winged monstrosity nested under its metal roof like a pterodactyl in a cave. "Get aboard," commanded Ewart. "We're going to try for it anyway!" He turned to his helper. "Hey, Brown, throw my friend up that fur coat of yours!"

"But what speed can you get out of this machine?" asked Manley as he clambered aboard the chassis and struggled with his seat-straps.

Ewart, who had been stooping over his engines, looked up. "I got one hundred and four an hour out of her this morning," he off-handedly announced. "But I think I can push her up to one hundred and ten."

Manley's heart beat faster.

"Then there's a chance!" he cried. "A fighting chance."

A sudden sense of chill caused Manley to clutch for the fur coat thrown in at his feet, and struggle into it. As he did so the earth seemed suddenly to fall away from him. Villages became spangled checker-boards of lights. Highways became winding strings of pearls.

Manley forgot the chilliness striking into his bones. He forgot Margery Golden and Legar. He forgot the origin of his mission that brought him winging through the midnight heavens. He forgot the fact of his own puny existence and the trivial ends to which it had been given over. All these he forgot, completely and utterly, until Ewart, sweeping out along the twinkling shore lights of South Brooklyn, circled north again where the brazen figure of Liberty guarded the upper bay, and dropped lower along that tapering point of gloom where Battery park nosed like a ship's prow into the tides of the Atlantic. They were still planing down, gently, like a settling sea bird, with the tilted planes veering a little westward to escape the beeting skyscrapers along the canyon of lower Broadway.

Manley thought, for a moment, that Ewart had misjudged his position. Then he felt sure that Ewart had also misjudged his height, that his stabilizing fin was already too low to clear the flat roof that abutted the light-strewn tower itself.

But Ewart, obviously, knew what he was about. For he took that oblong of flat gloom outlined in electric lights with a gentle upward undulation like the upward swoop of a bluebird alighting on a maple tree. Into that artful upward swoop was absorbed much of their momentum, for Ewart had plainly remembered that their running space was limited. But even with this precaution there remained a perilous paucity of runway, for before the bounding and quivering organism of nickel and steel and canvas came to a stop it lurched head-on into a wall of the tower itself.

Manley could hear the crash of glass as the damper plane at the nose of the quivering chassis brought up short against one of the tower windows. He was dimly aware of half-tumbling and half-climbing through a network of wooden studs and steel piano-wire stays and cross-guys. He was vaguely conscious of Ewart calling out that everything was all right, that there was

no damage which a half-hour's work couldn't patch up.

But Manley, in truth, was thinking little of either Ewart or his flier. All his thoughts, as he climbed frantically up through the broken tower window, were revolving about the problem as to whether or not he was too late. And that all-vital question still obsessed him as he mounted the iron treads of the stairway leading to the tower top, panting up flight after flight until his lungs seemed bursting for want of air, and his over-driven heart beat drumlike against his rib-cage. And as he reached the top and flung out through the narrow roof opening



They Fought With Gasps and Grunts.

on the campanile-like balcony crowning that skyscraping structure, he knew, even as he saw two figures standing there before him, that he was too late.

That much he knew, even before he caught at enough breath to call out a warning to Enoch Golden or swing about and spring for the second figure, already shrinking back in the shadow of that many-columned cupola. For in the hand of the second figure Manley had already caught sight of a tell-tale sheet of paper. It was a yellowed and time-worn scrap of paper, and little more, but to Manley it had become the emblem and pennon of a desperate cause, a flag to be rallied round and fought for, to the last ditch and the last gasp, as harried soldiers, cut through the smoke of battle for their colors.

And Manley, as he clinched with Legar's stalwart emissary, fought for it. Nor was his opponent one to be despised. The two men fought along the crest of that midnight tower as two mountain lions might fight along the brink of an Andean precipice. They fought with gasps and grunts, with strange guttural sounds, with teeth bared and face distorted, blind to the blows that were given and taken, unconscious of the fact that the very paper for which they were fighting had already fallen to the cupola floor, and from there had been blown by the north wind to the furthestmost edge of the cornice circling the stone column supports.

Golden himself was already reaching for that paper when Legar's confederate caught sight of it, broke from Manley's grasp and dove bodily for where it lay. Manley, a second later, followed him. There, half astride the balustrade of coppered wood painted to look like marble, the fight was renewed. Each crouched low as he fought, drunkenly conscious now of the abyss that yawned so close to his feet. But still they fought.

Then a second breath of night breeze, sighing through the tower top, carried the paper slowly along the cornice edge. It was Legar's man who saw it as it moved. He wrenched away, twisted about, and caught at it as it fell. But already he was too late. It lifted with the wind, drifted and eddied slowly about in the moonlight, and floated awfully down into the darker canyon of Broadway, where it was soon lost to sight.

But neither Manley nor his enemy saw that descent, for Legar's man as he lurched suddenly forward threw all his weight on the outstanding copper cornice, painted white to look like marble. And it was a cornice made only for ornamentation, and not for support. For its fastenings surrendered to the strain of that suddenly imposed weight and the buckling moment of copper swayed outward as desperately-clinging fingers clung at its edges.

Manley, hanging to the balustrade with one arm, reached out to grasp that buckling strip of metal to which a helpless man was hanging sheer over space. He caught at it, even as Golden caught at his straining shoulders to hold him steady.

But a law, stronger than the will of man, seemed to suck the metal slowly, inevitably, out of the clutch of his tired fingers. Then the last fastenings gave, the strained and twisted sheet-metal tore slowly away, and the black shadow of a man fell like a plummet to the iron and stone of Broadway, three hundred feet below.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)